



November 17, 2005

## Appeals Court affirms life sentence for drug trafficker

The United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit has affirmed a life sentence imposed last year on **Charles C. Brown**, who ran a crack cocaine business out of a house that he owned on Burnside Street in Providence. It was the first life sentence ever imposed in Rhode Island for drug trafficking.

United States Attorney Robert Clark Corrente announced the opinion, which the Court issued yesterday.

The Court upheld the convictions of Brown and two codefendants, **Charles H. Isler** and **Bilal Abdul Rashid**, noting that there was ample evidence to convict them. While affirming Brown's life sentence, the Court vacated sentences of 262 months and 210 months imposed on Isler and Rashid because the sentences were based on guidelines that at the time were considered mandatory. The Supreme Court has since ruled that the guidelines are only advisory.

In February 2004 a jury found Brown, Isler, and Rashid guilty of conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine. During the trial, Assistant U.S. Attorney Adi Goldstein presented evidence that the Providence Police Narcotics, Firearms and Organized Crime Bureau began investigating activities at the Burnside Street house after receiving complaints about suspected drug trafficking.

The house was heavily fortified. The rear entrance to the first floor apartment had a rectangular slot in the door that could be used for drug transactions. A double-door entrance was

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fortified with a steel gate. A green lamp and a red lamp were over an entrance to the ground floor apartment. Detectives surmised the lights indicated whether the house was open for business.

In June 2003, armed with a warrant, detectives forced their way through the fortified door, arrested the three defendants, and seized about 164 grams of crack cocaine.

Because Brown had two prior drug trafficking convictions when he was convicted of the crack conspiracy, federal law required a life sentence, which U.S. District Court Judge Mary M. Lisi imposed in May 2004. The Appeals Court affirmed Brown's sentence because it was based on a specific statute passed by Congress rather than on federal sentencing guidelines.

The Court noted that Judge Lisi had indicated that she may well have imposed shorter sentences on Isler and Rashid if the guidelines were not mandatory. Several months after the sentencing, the U.S. Supreme Court, in a case known as Booker, ruled that the guidelines are indeed advisory rather than mandatory. As a result, the First Circuit vacated the sentences imposed on Isler and Rashid and remanded the case to the District Court for resentencing.

Isler and Rashid will remain in federal custody pending resentencing, which has not been scheduled.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Donald C. Lockhart argued the appeal for the government. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Goldstein and Kenneth P. Madden prosecuted the case in the District Court.

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Contact: 401-709-5032

[Thomas.connell@usdoj.gov](mailto:Thomas.connell@usdoj.gov)

**Read the First Circuit opinion in the Green Light Crack House case  
on the U.S. Attorney's Web site:**

<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/ri/>